

THE LINCOLN STAR (NE)
18 March 1982

Ex-spy weaves tantalizing tale of espionage

By Kate Gaul
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A former aerospace engineer turned spy for the U.S. government Wednesday weaved a tantalizing tale of international espionage complete with Soviet KGB agents, hidden microphones and U.S. agents turning against U.S. citizens.

Peter James was an engineer with Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in Florida in the mid-1960s when he was approached by the Central Intelligence Agency. His job took him to Europe and South America where he hobnobbed with the elite of the Russian scientists. So, he said, the CIA wanted him to use the international conferences to gather information on the Russian space industry.

But because of his experiences, James said, he also uncovered information linking the Air Force foreign technology division — the intelligence division — with false reports meant to mislead the United States.

He said some members of the CIA and the FBI were undertaking "black bag jobs" in the name of national security and the IRS was being used to embarrass people who spoke out against the then-Nixon administration. He also said the Air Force agents used intimidation to keep U.S. engineers from exposing their darker dealings.

And, in his own experience, the agents threatened his life.

James eventually did go public with two books "The Soviet Conquest from Space" — with information he gathered from high-level Soviet scientists — and "The Air Force Mafia," which detailed his experiences after it became known in 1971 that he planned to write the expose of rotten U.S. spies.

On his last conference trip overseas, after he had been warned by contacts in the CIA that there was a conspiracy to discredit him, James said KGB intelligence confirmed that he and his wife were under surveillance by American agents and

might be in danger.

What followed, James said, unfolded like a Hitchcock thriller. He fled the Yugoslavian conference on the advice of Russian spies, who were evidently trying to protect him as a possible communist sympathizer.

The conference schedule took him to Brussels, where, he said, Air Force agents told him, "we have friends in the Mafia who could pull off an automobile accident."

In a scene out of a grade B spy thriller James and his wife fled in a cab to the American embassy while being chased by the Air Force agents and eventually were flown to the United States.

Since that time, after which he was fired by Pratt and Whitney, James said he has undertaken the task of informing the public.

His expose efforts led to the transference of some of the technology division chiefs and a general cleanup of the department, James said.